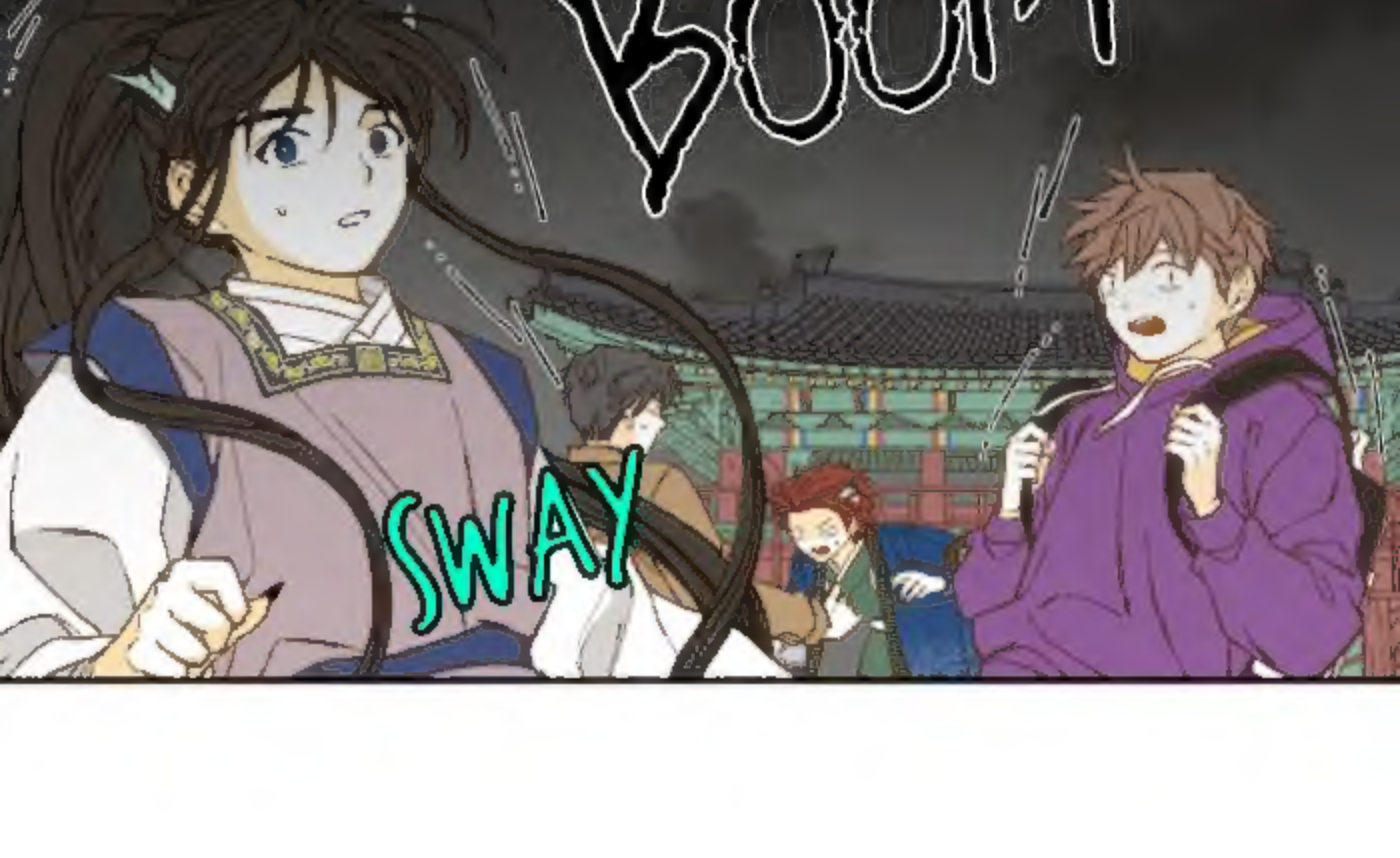
THEN...
CREEEEAK
...WE WILL NOW BEGIN...
...THE FINAL EXAM...
THUD

...FOR THE NAKDONG RIVER DRAGON.


BOOM
SWAY

RRRRUMBLE
W-WHAT...?
WHAT'S GOING ON?

HUH?
GRAB
WHY--

WHOA...
RRRRUMBLE

AAAAAH!!

CRASH

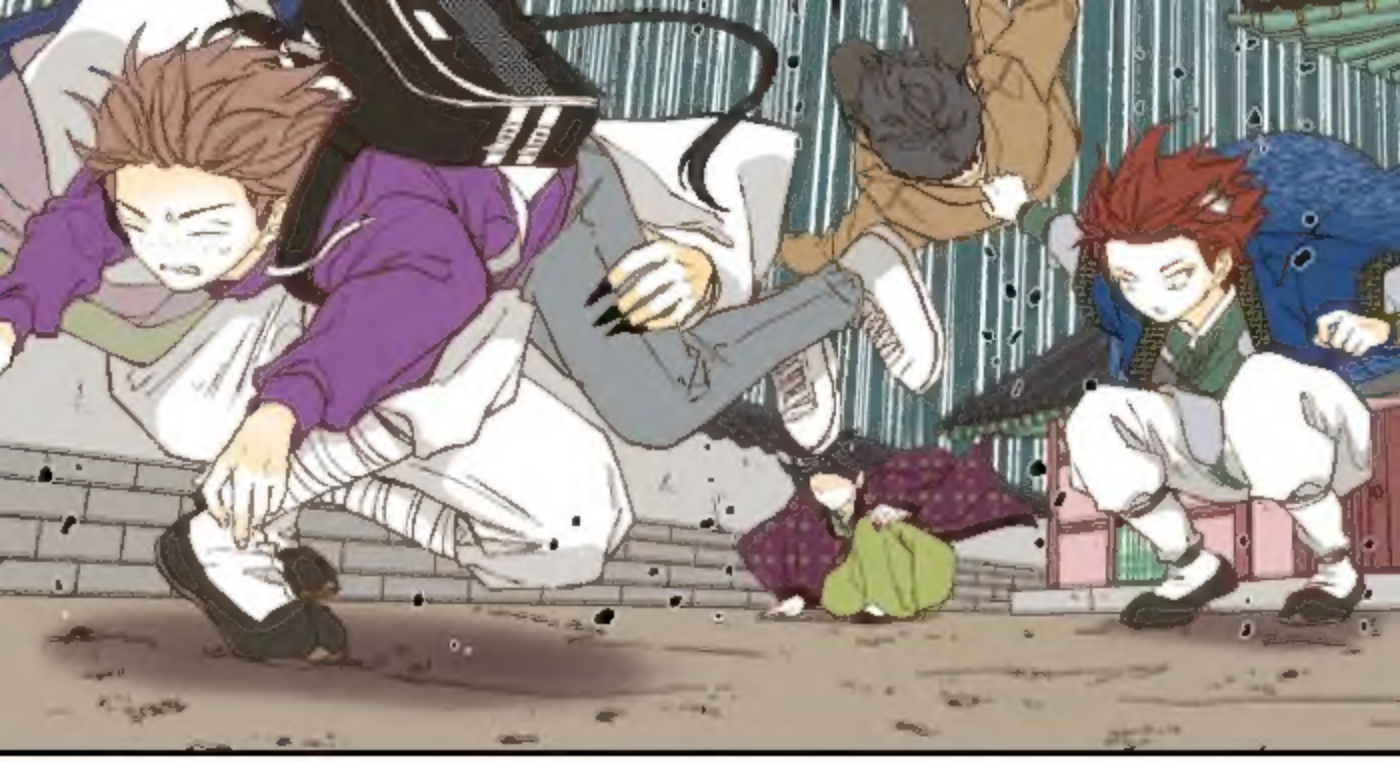
W...
WHAT IS THIS?

WHAT IS THIS?
NOT AGAIN...
AAAH...
CRRRASH
UGH, STAY STILL!

AAAAAH!

BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM

SLAM

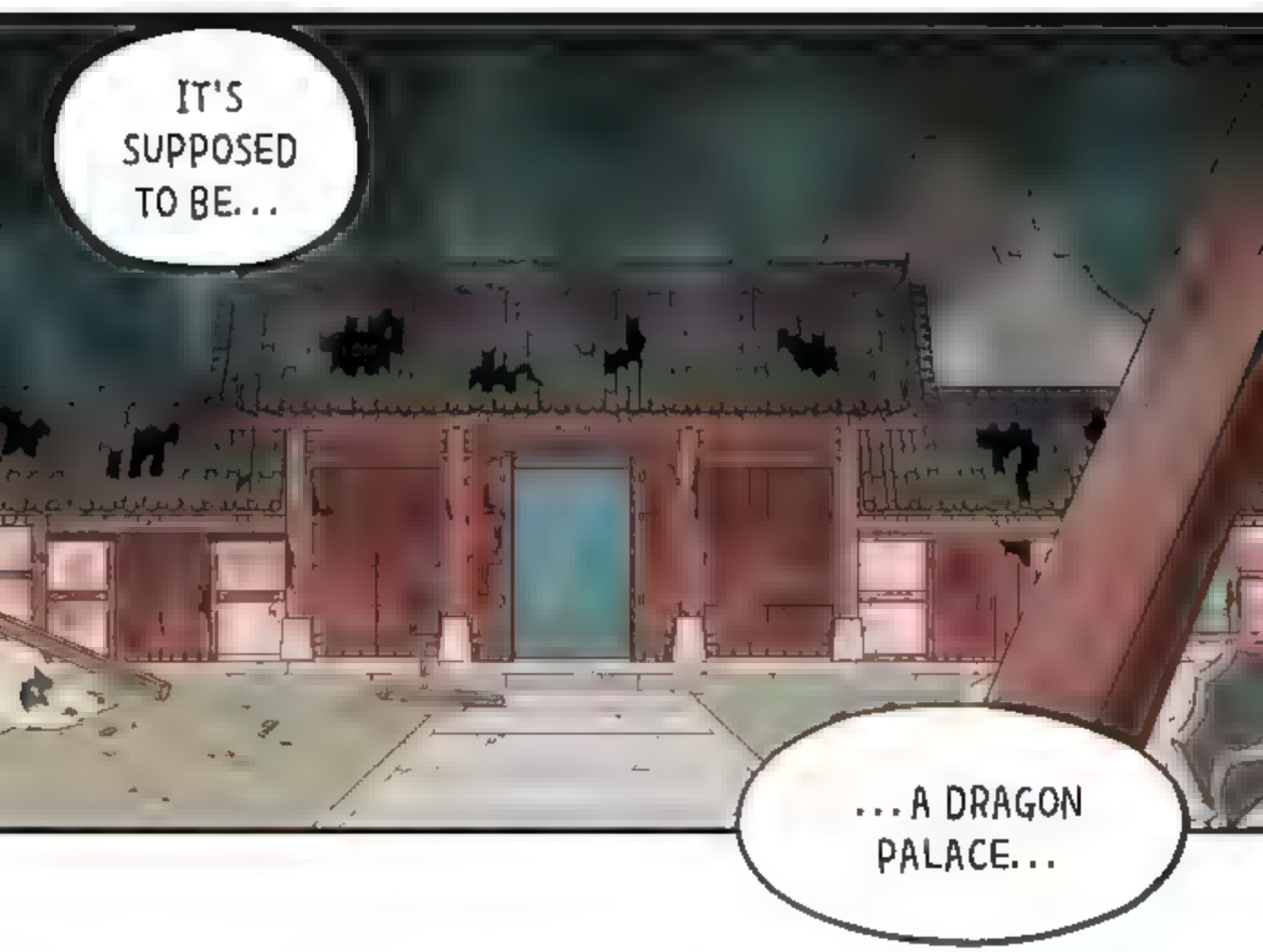


YOUNG!
ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
DEJA VU
IS SLAMMING BUILDINGS DOWN A HOBBY FOR ALL DRAGON KINGS?

YOU'RE RIGHT...
CREEEEAK
I DIDN'T KNOW THIS WOULD HAPPEN AGAIN LIKE IT DID IN THE SECOND EXAM...

CRACK

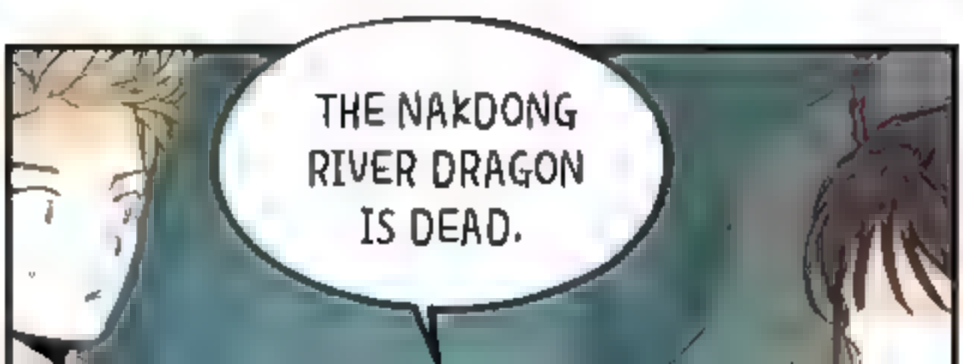
WHAT...
...IS THAT...?


IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE...
...A DRAGON PALACE...

HOW
TO BECOME
A DRAGON

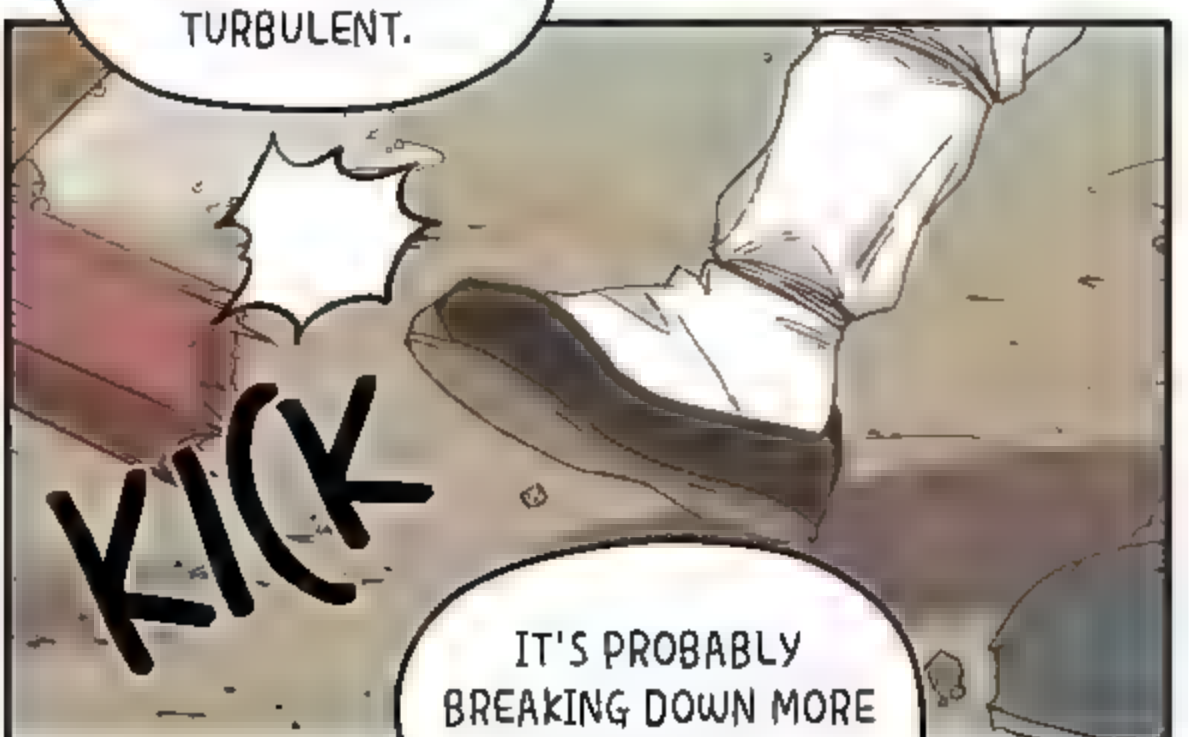
- EPISODE 143 -

THIS IS JUST...
MURMUR
...AN ABANDONED BUILDING...


THE NAKDONG RIVER DRAGON IS DEAD.

THERE'S NO WAY THE PALACE IS DOING ALRIGHT.

IT LOST ITS OWNER AND THE WATERS ARE TURBULENT.



IT'S PROBABLY BREAKING DOWN MORE EACH DAY.

ALL OF THE CREATURES THAT LIVED HERE HAVE LIKELY DIED OFF,

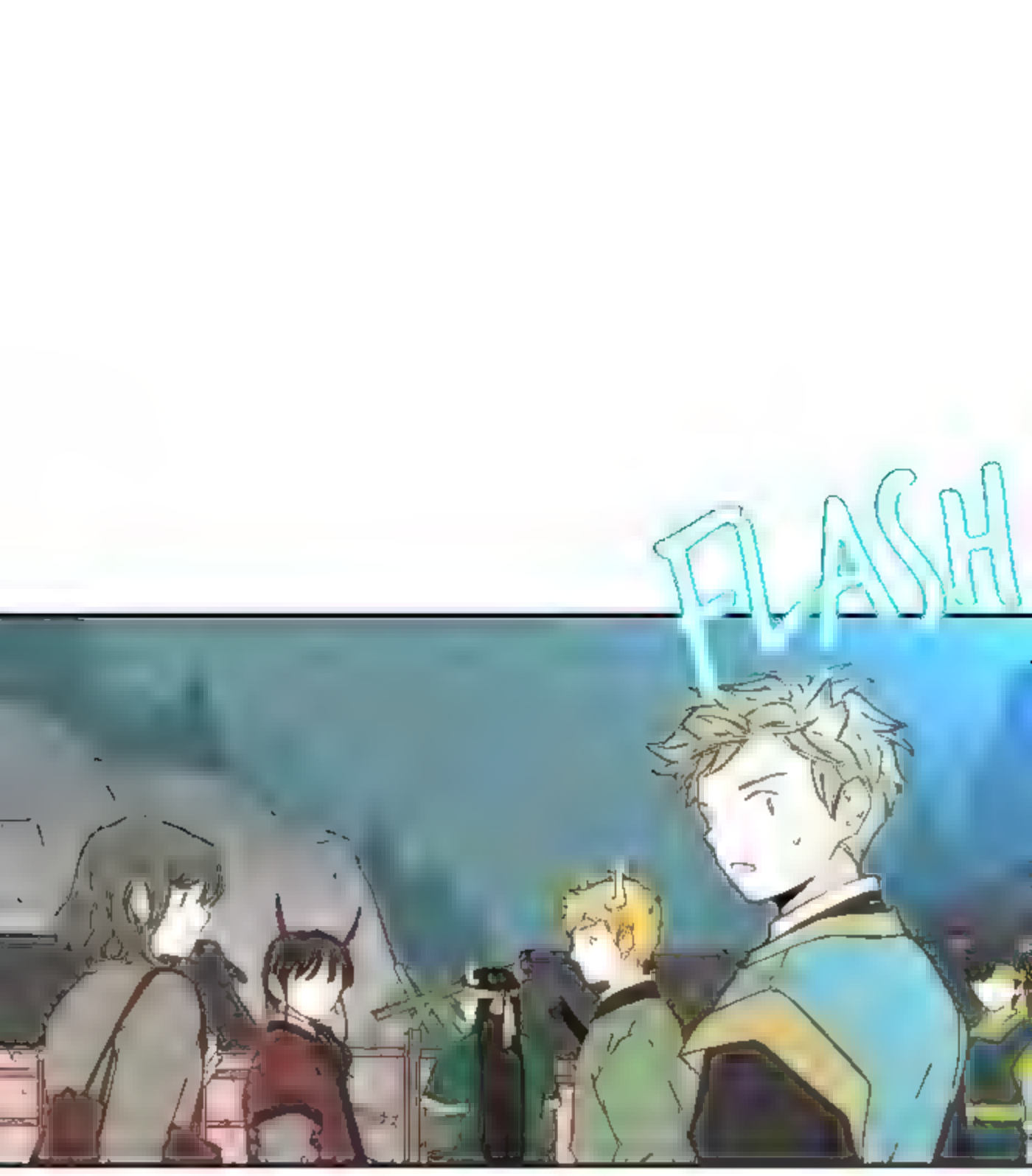
TOO...

IF A DRAGON DIES...
...ITS PALACE DIES TOO.

I EXPECTED THE WATER TO BE DIRTY...
...BUT I DIDN'T KNOW EVEN THE PALACE WOULD BE THIS BAD...

HOW DO YOU LIVE IN A PALACE LIKE THIS?
I COULDN'T...

FWOOSH


FLASH

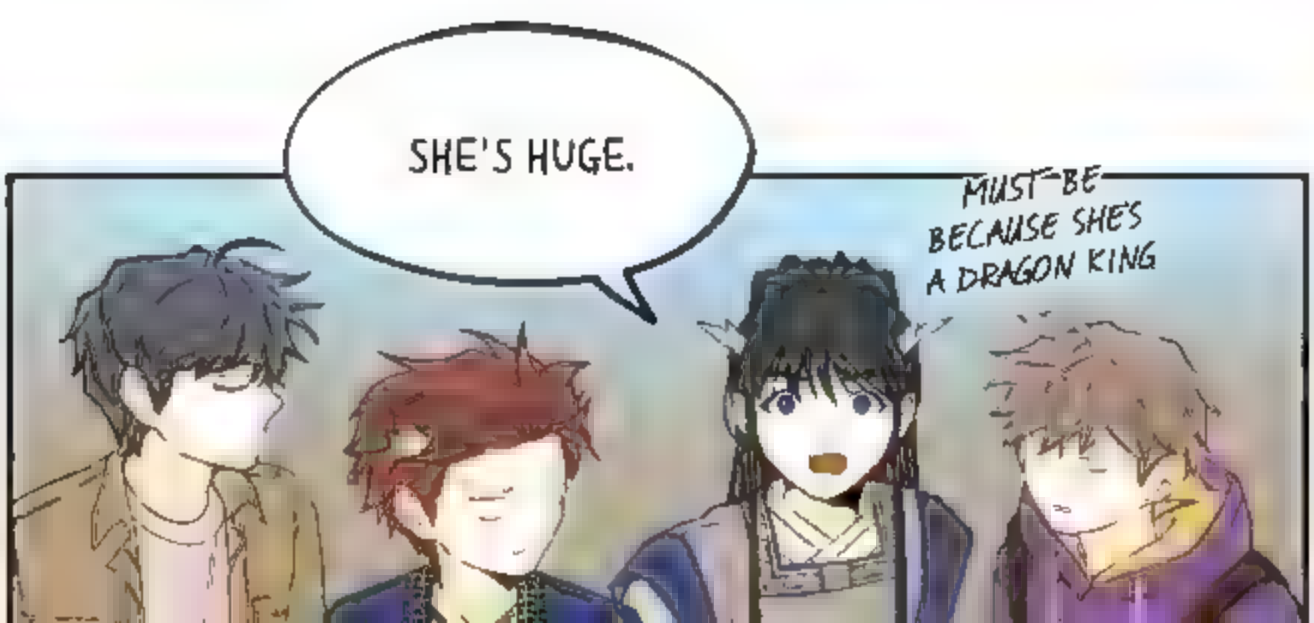
SHAKK

SHHHHH

HMM...
THERE ARE QUITE A FEW OF YOU HERE.
I DON'T BELIEVE ANY OF YOU HAVE MET ME.

I AM THE DRAGON KING OF THE SOUTHERN SEA.

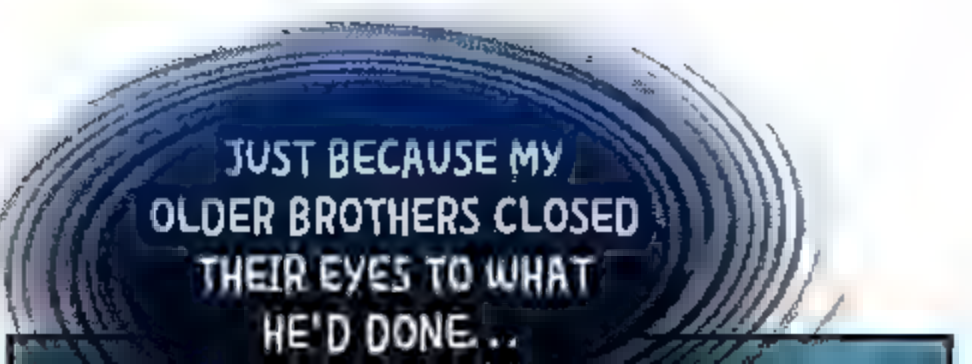
THAT'S...
...THE SOUTHERN DRAGON KING...


SHE'S HUGE.
MUST BE BECAUSE SHE'S A DRAGON KING

...
...
...

I DIDN'T THINK IT WAS TRUE...
...BUT ONE IMOOGI IS INDEED MISSING.

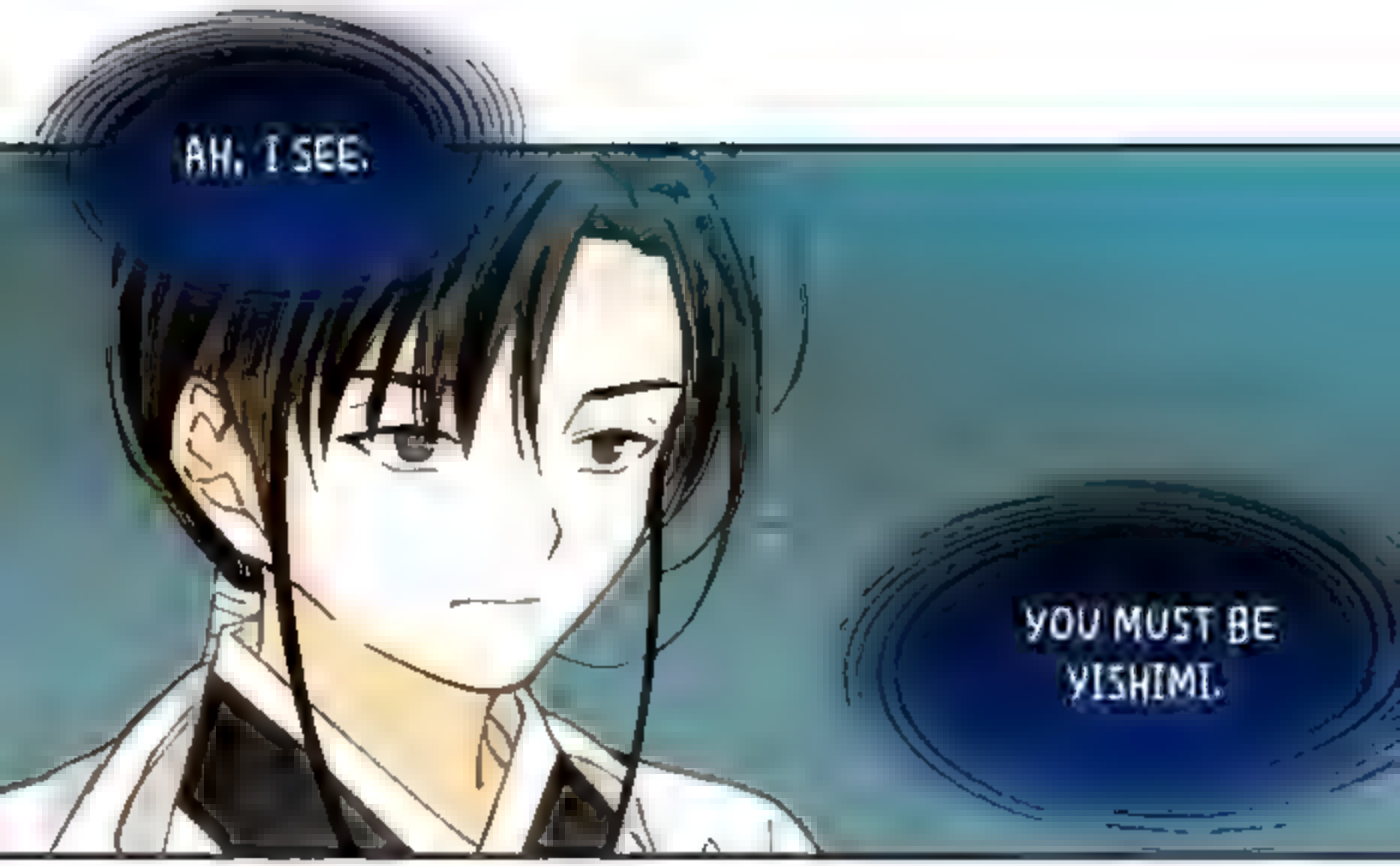
I HEARD HE'D DONE SOMETHING CHEEKY.
I WAS WAITING FOR HIM.
SOMETHING CHEEKY?


JUST BECAUSE MY OLDER BROTHERS CLOSED THEIR EYES TO WHAT HE'D DONE...

...DOESN'T MEAN THAT I WOULDN'T KNOW ABOUT IT.
...

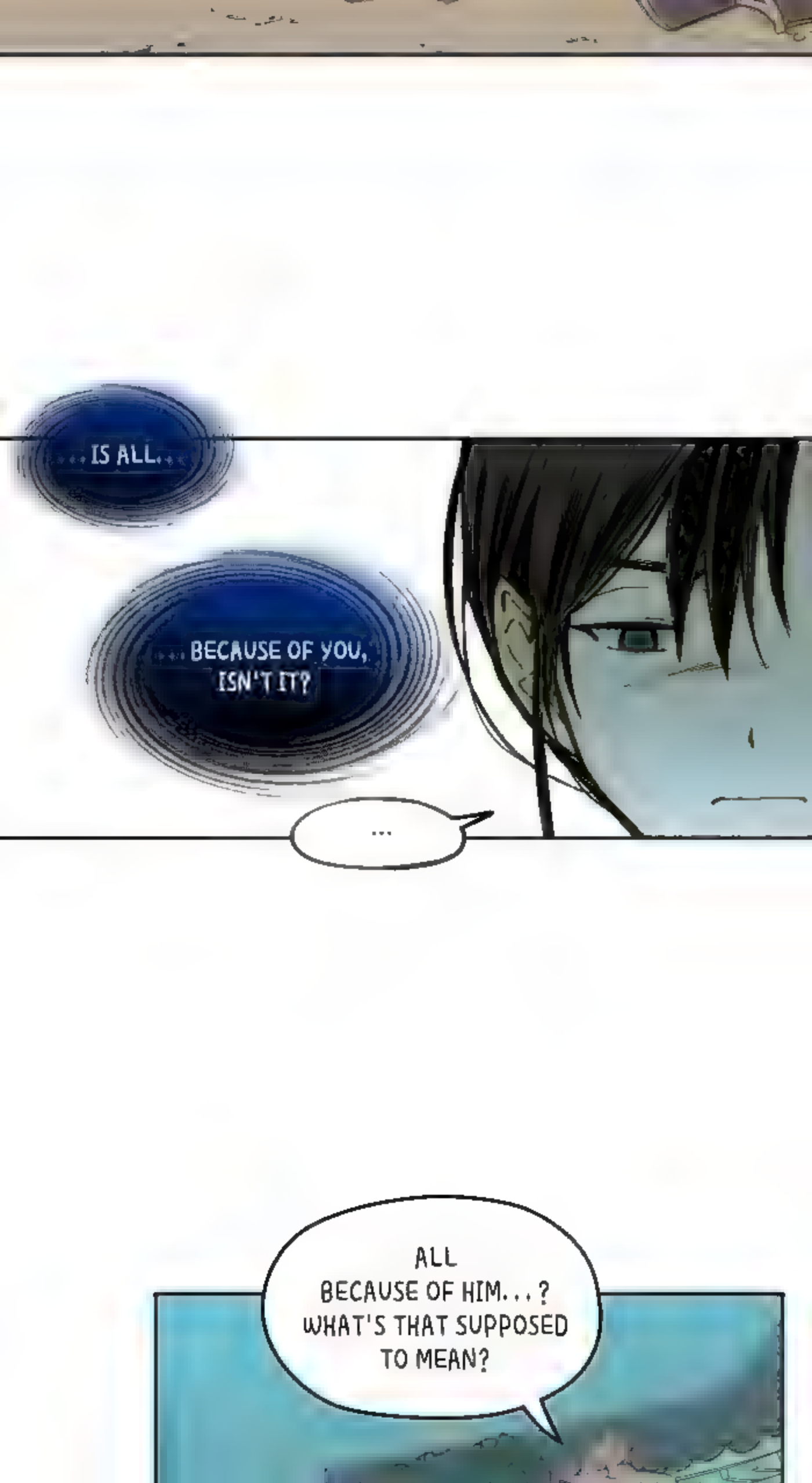
I INTENDED TO TEAR HIM TO SHREDS IF HE DARED SHOW HIS IMPUDENT FACE HERE...
...BUT IT SEEMS HE CATCHES ON QUICKLY.

...!

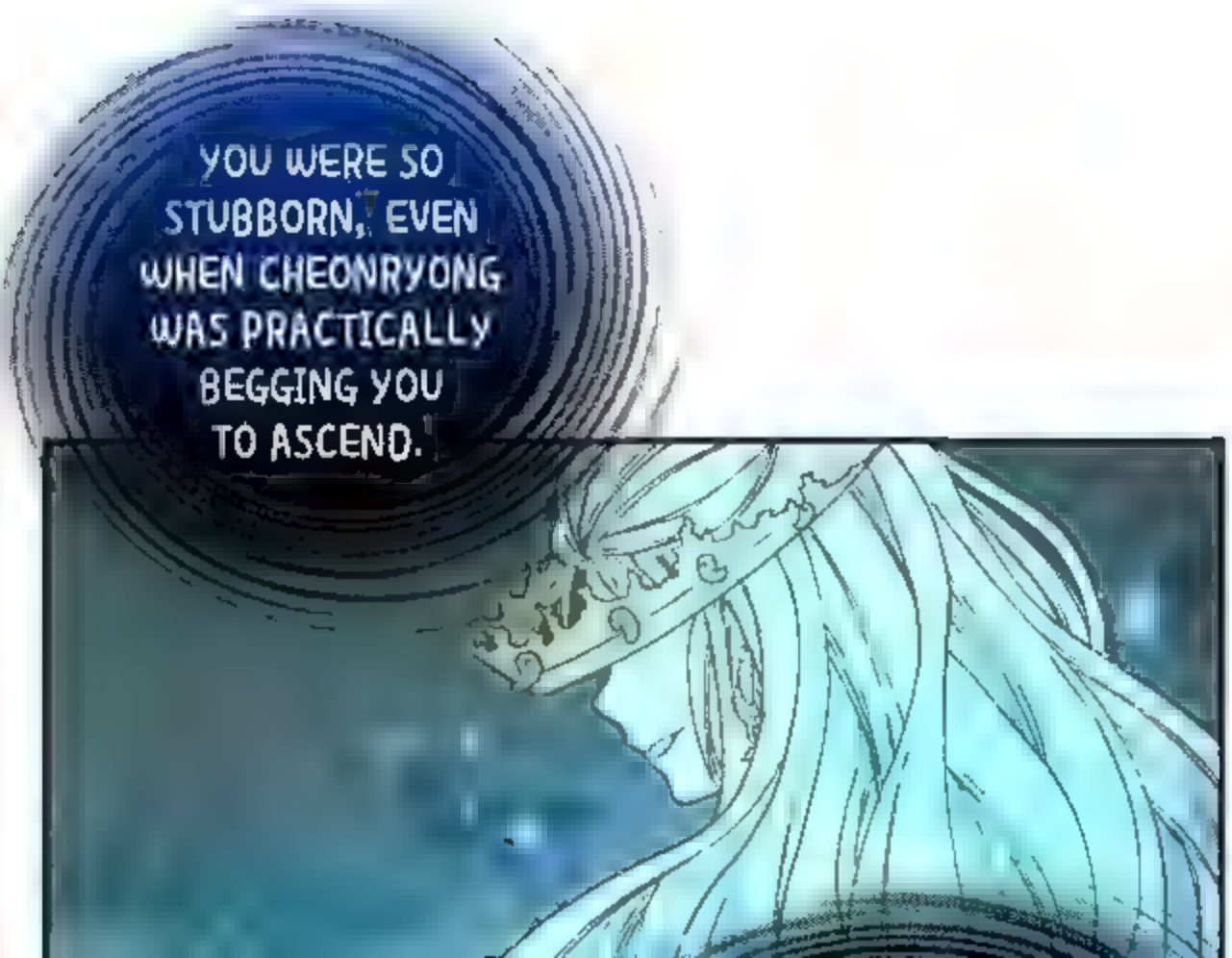

AH, I SEE.
YOU MUST BE YISHIMI.

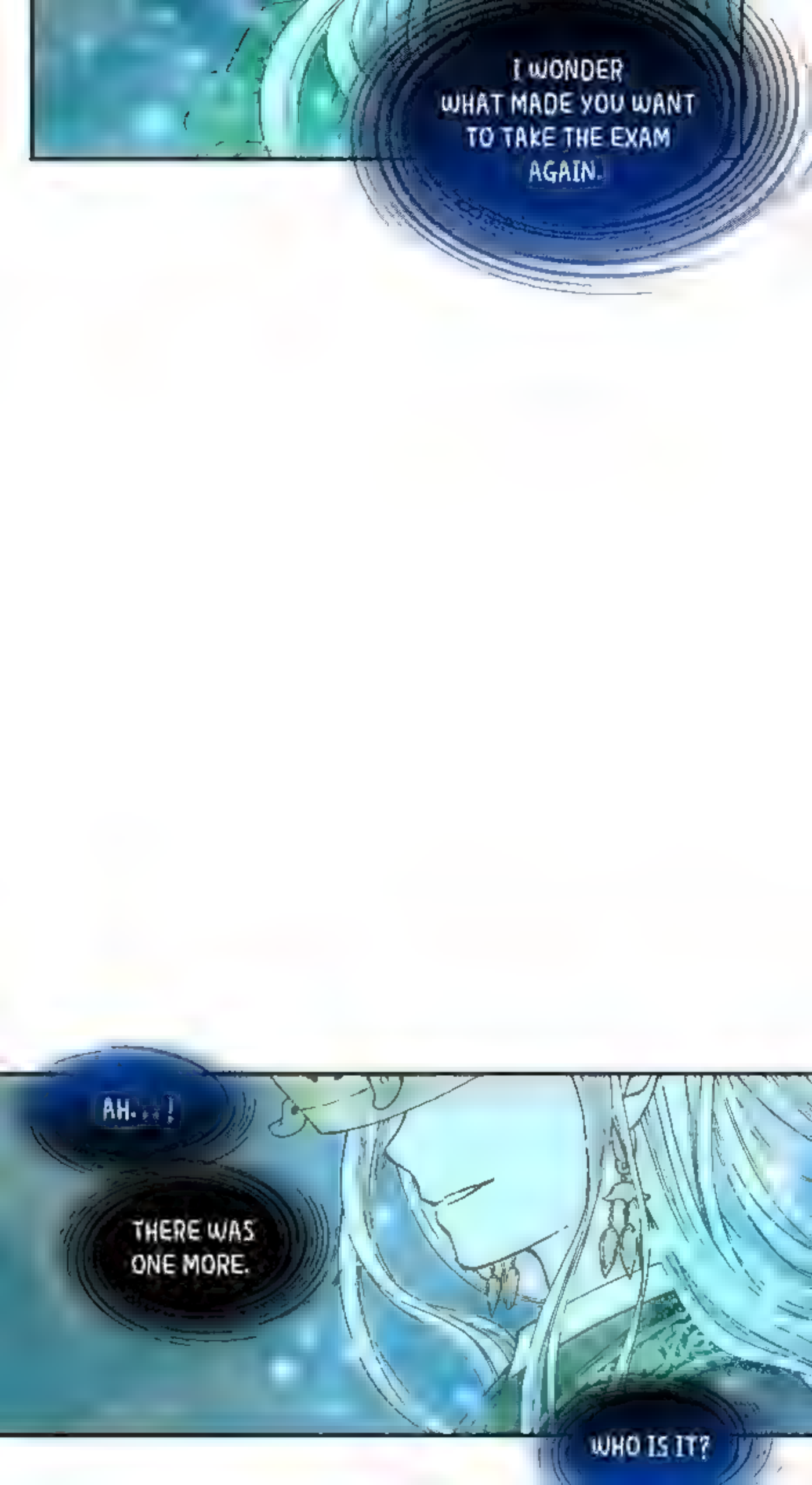
I HAVE HEARD MUCH ABOUT YOUR...

...SITUATION.
THE REASON THE ASCENSION EXAMS ARE LIKE THIS NOW...
...AND THE NAKDONG RIVER DRAGON'S DEATH...


...IS ALL...
...BECAUSE OF YOU, ISN'T IT?
...
ALL BECAUSE OF HIM...? WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

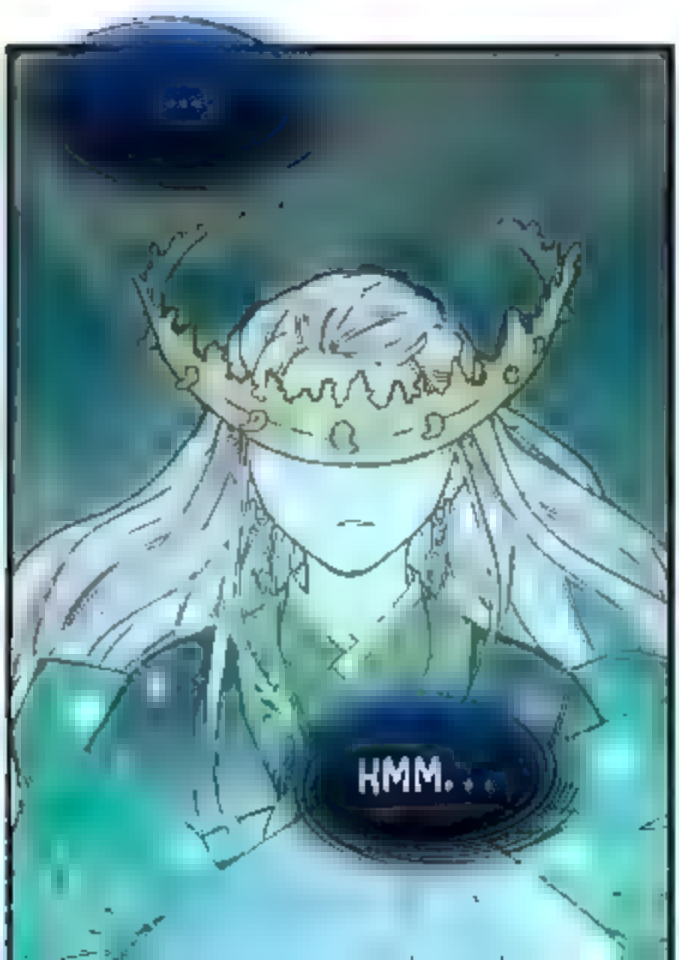
?
?
?
I HAVE NOT HEARD ABOUT THIS BEFORE EITHER.


YOU WERE SO STUBBORN, EVEN WHEN CHEONRYONG WAS PRACTICALLY BEGGING YOU TO ASCEND.


I WONDER WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO TAKE THE EXAM AGAIN.
AH...!
THERE WAS ONE MORE.
WHO IS IT?

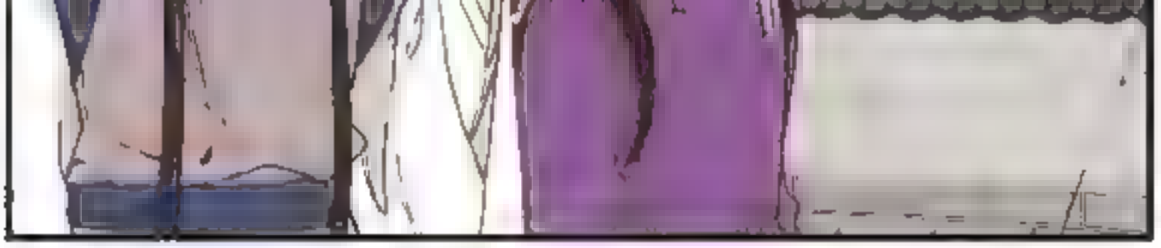
ME...
RAISE
IT'S ME.

GULP


HMM...

I SEE.
TURN
I WILL NOW TELL YOU ABOUT THE THIRD EXAM.

...
AS YOU CAN SEE, THIS IS THE NAKDONG RIVER DRAGON PALACE.
...



WELL...
...
BASED ON WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE, PERHAPS IT MAY BE MORE FITTING TO CALL IT THE AREA THE DRAGON PALACE WAS IN.

EVEN IF THE NAKDONG RIVER'S WATERS WERE HEAVILY POLLUTED...

...IT IS ENTIRELY UNPRECEDENTED FOR A DRAGON TO DIE.
HIS PASSING WAS SO UNBELIEVABLE TO ME THAT I LOOKED INTO IT...
...AND THE CAUSE WAS RIGHT INSIDE THE NAKDONG RIVER DRAGON PALACE.
!

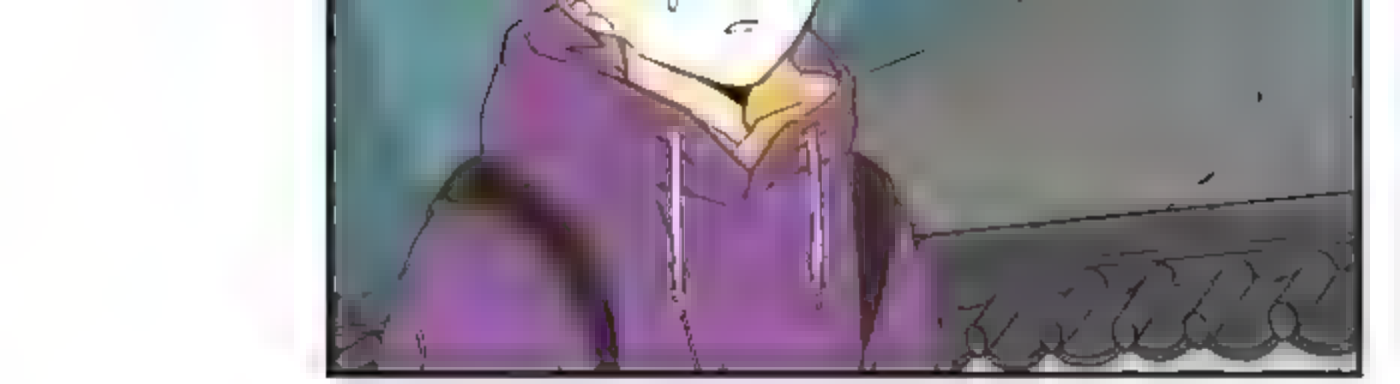
IF YOU WISH TO BECOME THE DRAGON OF A RIVER...
...YOU MUST PROTECT THREE THINGS.

THE WATER THAT FLOWS FROM THE SOURCE AND MAKES UP THE RIVER...
...THE DRAGON PALACE THAT STANDS UPON THE WIDEST AND MOST FERTILE LAND IN THE RIVER...
...AND ALL OF THE MORTAL AND IMMORTAL CREATURES THAT LIVE AND BREATHE HERE.
WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT...

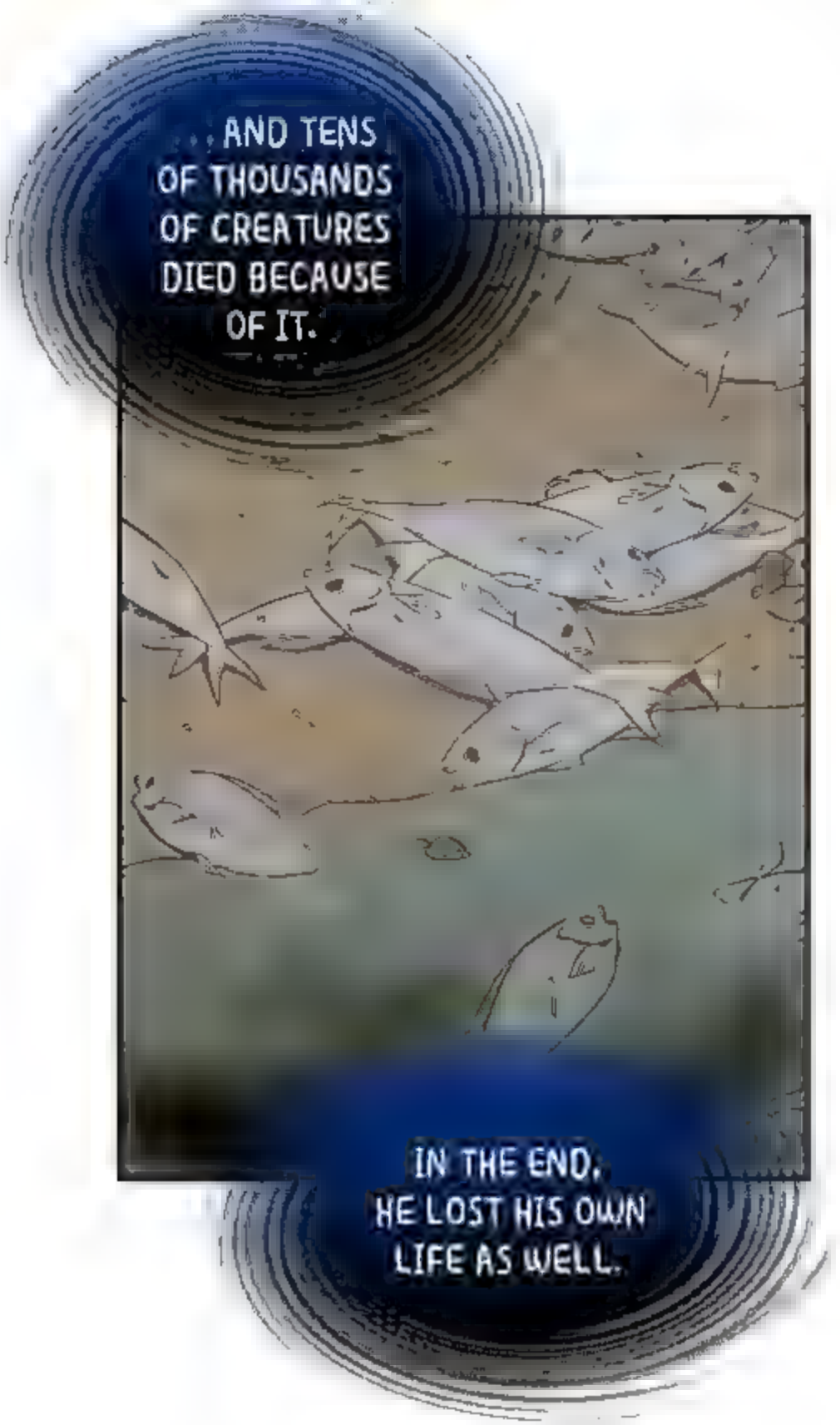
...OF THESE THREE THINGS?

WITHOUT WATER, THERE IS NO PALACE, NO CREATURES, AND NO DRAGON.
THEN, IF THE SITUATION BEGINS GOING BADLY...
...WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU SHOULD ABANDON?

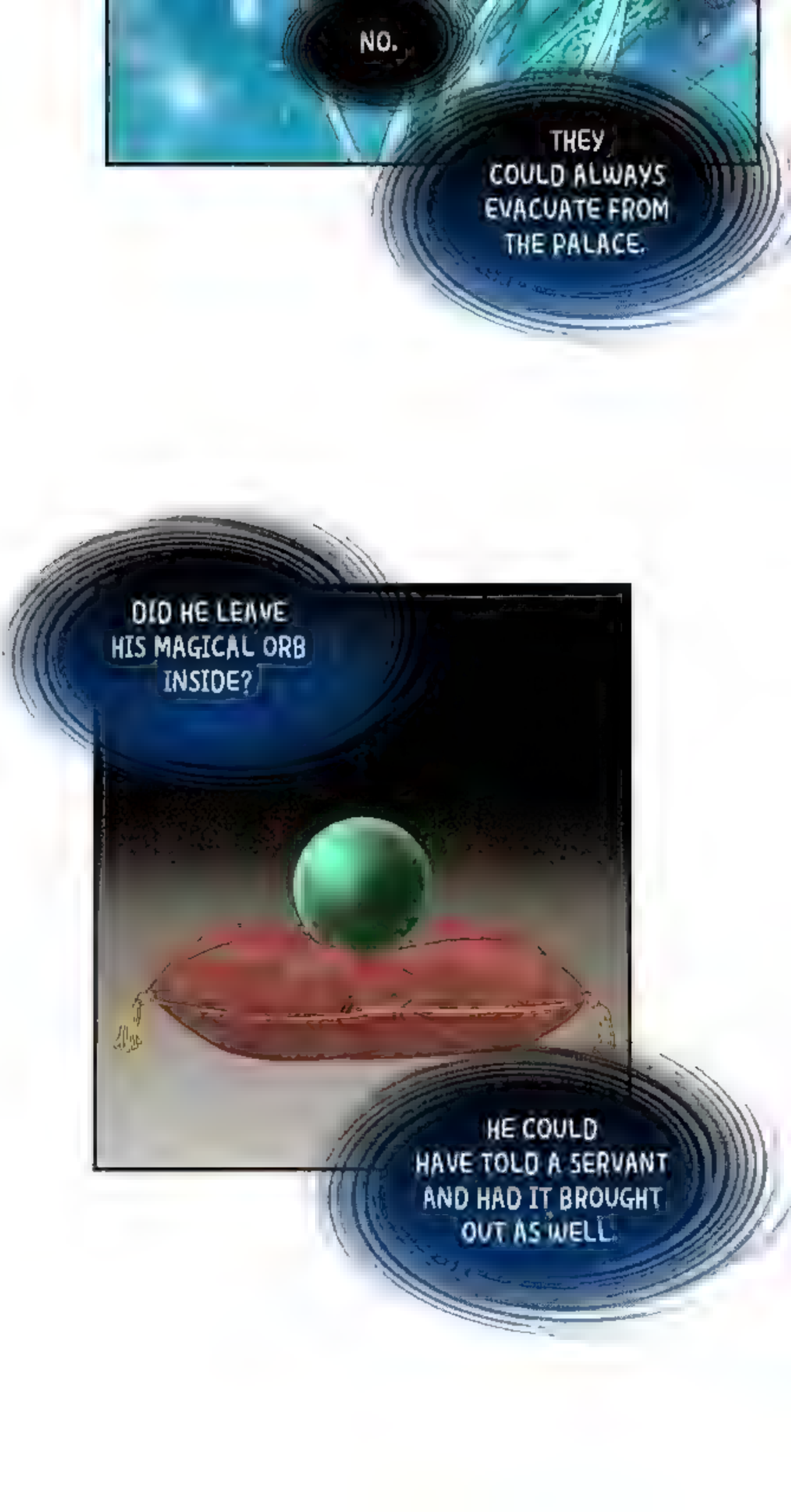
THE PALACE...?



HOWEVER,
THIS POOR DRAGON COULD NOT LET GO OF ANY ONE OF THESE THREE THINGS.
HE COULD NOT STOP THE POLLUTION

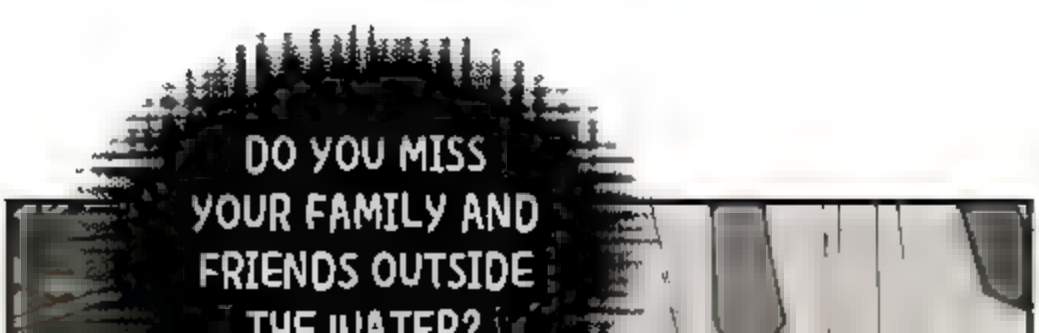

...AND TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CREATURES DIED BECAUSE OF IT.
IN THE END, HE LOST HIS OWN LIFE AS WELL.

THEN I BEGAN TO WONDER.
WHY COULDN'T HE ABANDON HIS PALACE?
HE COULD ALWAYS JUST CREATE ANOTHER ONE.
WAS IT BECAUSE OF THE CREATURE LIVING WITHIN IT?

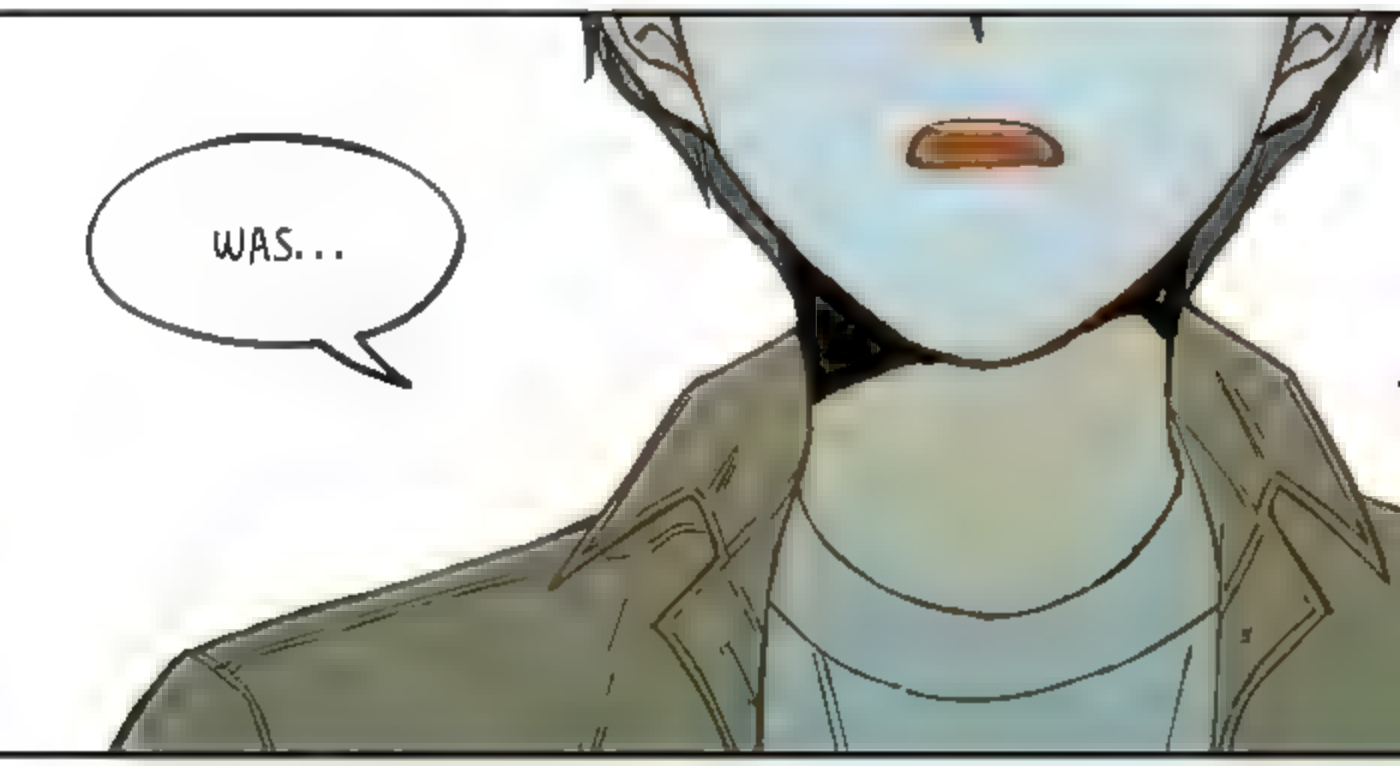

NO.
THEY COULD ALWAYS EVACUATE FROM THE PALACE.
DID HE LEAVE HIS MAGICAL ORB INSIDE?
HE COULD HAVE TOLD A SERVANT AND HAD IT BROUGHT OUT AS WELL.

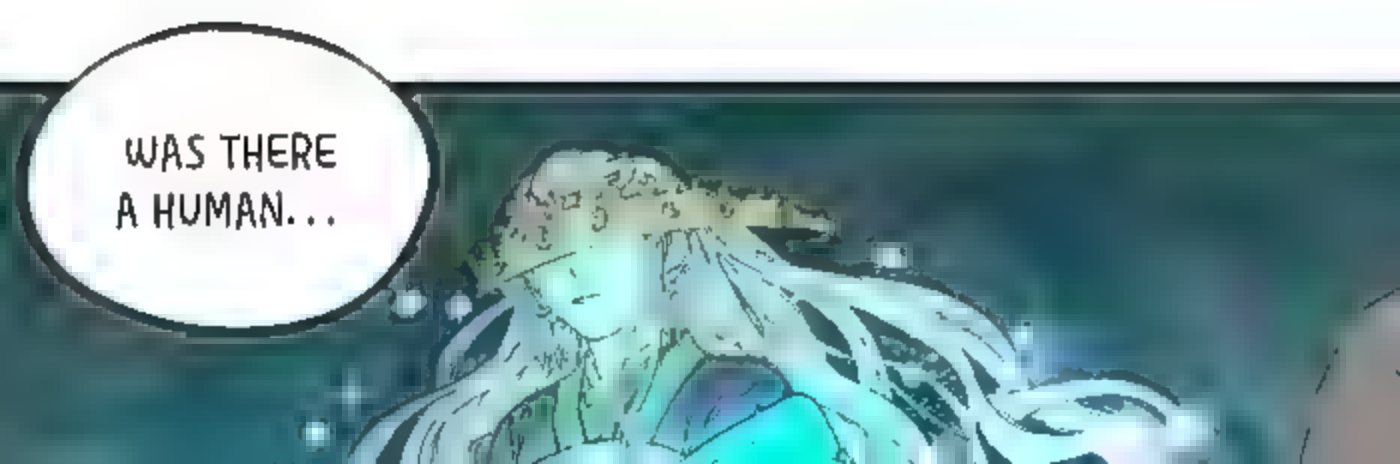
WHAT IS THE REASON THE PALACE HAD TO REMAIN?
...
WAS THERE SOMETHING ELSE THAT WOULD ALSO CEASE TO EXIST IF THE PALACE CRUMBLED?

DO YOU NOT WISH TO LIVE HERE?
I'M SURE MY PALACE HAS EVERYTHING YOU NEED...


DO YOU MISS YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS OUTSIDE THE WATER?

YOU CAN START A NEW FAMILY HERE.
WITHIN A DRAGON PALACE...
...EVEN HUMANS CAN HAVE NEARLY IMMORTAL LIFESPANS.


WAS...


WAS THERE
A HUMAN...

...IN THE NAKDONG RIVER PALACE...?
THAT'S CORRECT.
HE WAS HIDING...
...A HUMAN IN THE DRAGON PALACE.

IF THE PALACE WAS DESTROYED, THE SERVANTS COULD SIMPLY FLEE...
...BUT, A HUMAN WOULD DROWN IN THE WATER AND DIE.

A SIMPLE, MORTAL HUMAN...

...CAUSED THE DRAGON OF A RIVER TO DIE.

THE DRAGON WHO TOOK CARE OF THIS RIVER FOR A LONG TIME...

...A HIGHLY CHERISHED CHILD..

EVERYTHING WAS LOST BECAUSE OF A HUMAN. I EXPECTED CHEONRYONG TO BE SICK OF HUMANS NOW...

THEN,
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE HUMAN?

AS YOU CAN SEE, THE PALACE HAS NOT FALLEN COMPLETELY.
THE HUMAN SHOULD BE INSIDE SOMEWHERE...

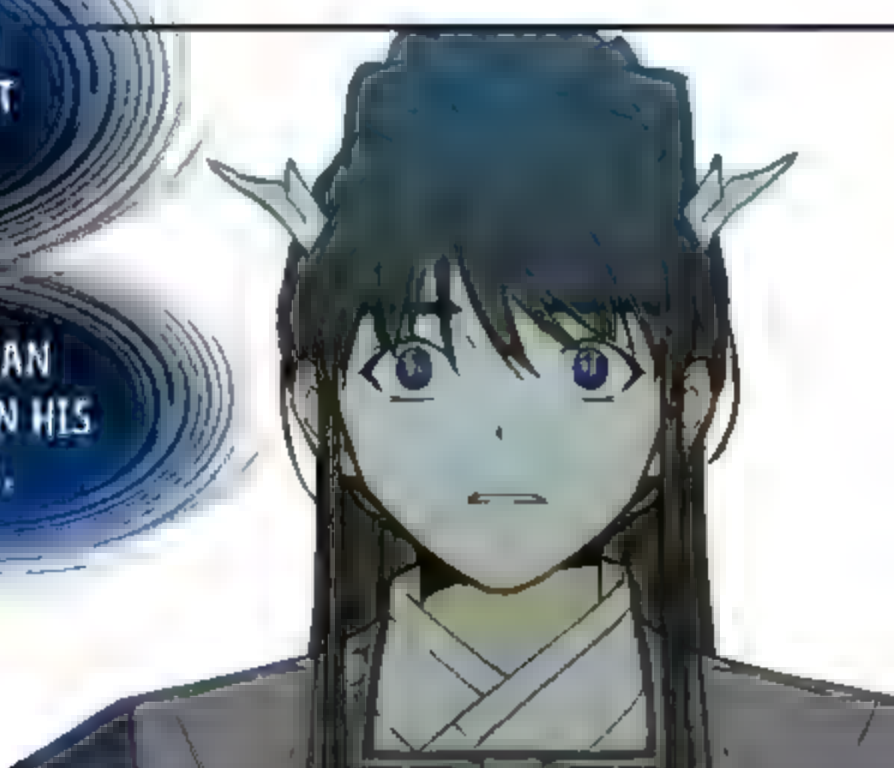
...BUT HE HAS DISAPPEARED.

NOT ONLY THAT...
...BUT HE HAS TAKEN THE NAKDONG RIVER DRAGON'S MAGICAL ORB WITH HIM.
I COULD NOT FIND HIM WITHIN THE PALACE, NO MATTER HOW HARD I LOOKED.
HE STOLE THE MAGICAL ORB...?

THAT WRETCHED HUMAN STOLE THE LATE NAKDONG RIVER DRAGON'S MAGICAL ORB.

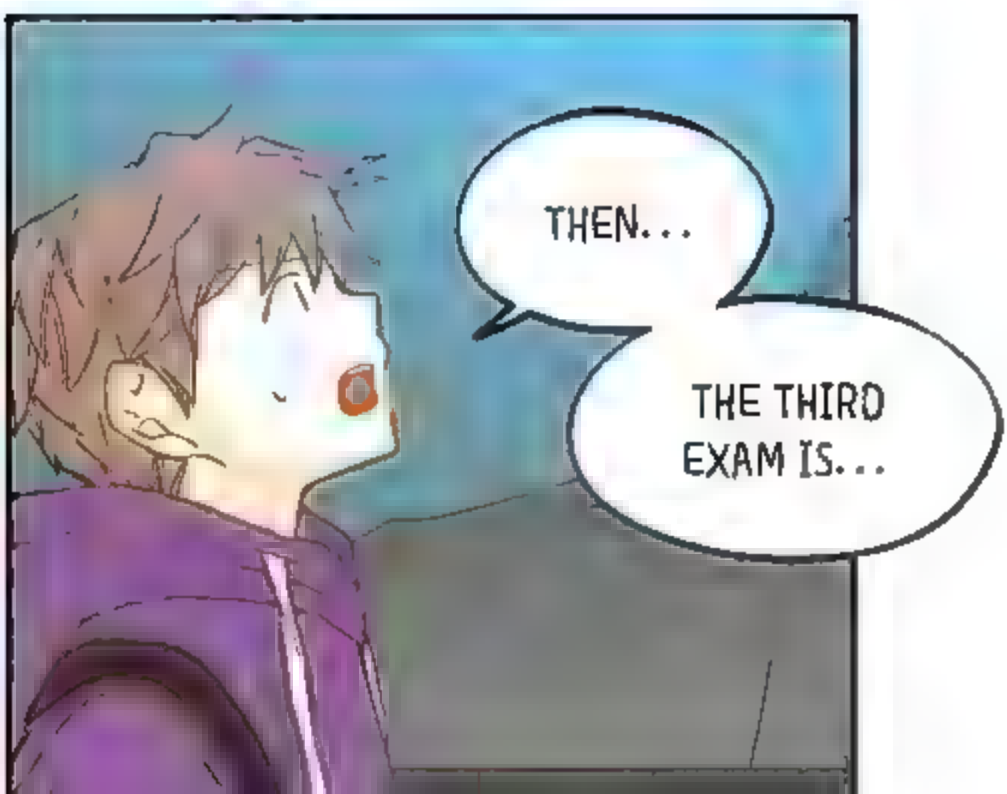
...ABANDONED THE DRAGON THAT TOOK HIM IN,

AND RAN AWAY ON HIS OWN.



HOWEVER, ONCE A HUMAN BEGINS LIVING IN A DRAGON PALACE, IT CANNOT LIVE OUTSIDE OF IT.
I'M CERTAIN THAT HE COULD NOT HAVE ESCAPED THE NAKDONG RIVER.

THAT HUMAN WHO DARED COVET A DRAGON'S TREASURE...
...AND THE STOLEN MAGICAL ORB MUST BE BURIED IN THIS RIVER SOMEWHERE.


THEN...
THE THIRD EXAM IS...

SAHH
THAT'S RIGHT.

IT IS
TO FIND...
RRRRMBLE
...THE MAGICAL
ORB THAT THE HUMAN
STOLE FROM THE NAKDONG
RIVER DRAGON.
WHETHER IT IS
RE

CRACKED, BROKEN, OR FADED...

RUMBLE

...I DO NOT CHARE.

THE IMOOGI WHO FINDS THE LOST MAGICAL ORB OF THE NAKDONG RIVER...

BOOM

...AND PLACES IT HERE...

...IS THE FINALIST...

...OF THE NAKDONG RIVER DRAGON EXAM.